

TITLE: Message Received - Unfortunately

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~~SECRET/NOFORN~~*In the clear and in the blind*

MESSAGE RECEIVED — UNFORTUNATELY

(b)(3)(c)

Countless times commo has received and delivered a message under adverse circumstances; many times this has been instrumental in the success of an operation. This is one instance where perhaps it might have been best if commo had failed to receive the message.

I was a young communicator on my first tour (b)(1) (b)(1) in 1960. Some of my colleagues were on a TDY "flying squad." Every few months they would go off to some unknown destination for several weeks to return tight-lipped about where they had been but with a smug grin indicating they had done something special. I was eager to get in on this action; I wanted to do something spooky. After all, I thought, this was what it was all about. When one of the "flying squad" communicators rotated to another job, I was selected to fill the vacancy. I still did not know what I would be doing or where I would go, but I was ready. Finally I received the initial alert—"You're on standby; be prepared to leave on a moment's notice."

A week or so later, at about 10 p.m., I received a telephone call at my residence in (b)(1). It was couched in guarded terms, something to the effect: "You're on a standby TDY list. How soon can you be ready to leave? An hour or two?" I did not know the caller, but said I was prepared to leave. What, I asked, were my instructions? First, we had to find my traveling partner on the team, a bachelor. He did not answer the phone at home. Did I know where he might be? Recollecting this query, I have to laugh. A bachelor in (b)(1) at 10 p.m. could be at any of a hundred or so places offering various forms of enjoyment. I gave my caller some leads and he said he would get back to me. In the wee hours of the morning, with me still wide awake in anticipation, the phone rang once again. "Get to (b)(1) and check in at desk so-and-so at the operations center ASAP." Off I went, leaving the wife and children, to begin my unknown adventure.

I joined my bleary-eyed colleague, (b)(3)(c) and we were put on a US Air Force airplane with a grumbling crew who had been waiting for us all night. It was now circa 6 a.m. Climbing aboard, we found we were the only passengers in an aircraft the size of the (b)(3)(c) bowling cent(b)(3)(c) an old hand on the team, stated this looked like a fast-moving exercise and there would not be time for a formal briefing for me before we deployed to the advance base. He therefore decided to brief me. We were going out in support of a black overflight of the Soviet Union by a super spy plane called the U-2. Gangbusters! I had finally arrived! This *was* spooky.

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Boyhood Acquaintance

In the evening we landed at Adana, Turkey, where we were hustled through some kind of passport/immigration control and shuttled off to a house trailer occupied by a commo tech. There we feasted on a can of Dinty Moore's beef stew, which was described to me as probably being the best meal I would have in a week or so. The gilt was coming off the lily already. Shortly thereafter, we boarded a C-130 loaded with two vans and various and sundry other boxes. I had already been strongly reminded that this was a super-secret operation and to keep my mouth shut and ask no questions. Much to my chagrin, my jumpseat co-passenger, dressed in Air Force fatigues with sergeant chevrons, started yelling at me above the roar of the takeoff that he thought he knew me. I indicated that we would talk later as we leveled off and removed our ear plugs. After the noise abated to a dull roar, we re-established an old acquaintance. (b)(3)(c) had preceded me by a year or two in high school and we had played CYO basketball against one another. He invited me to visit in his van after we landed and got set up.

It seemed like days later we landed at the staging site, a Pakistani Air Force base in Peshawar, and began unloading and setting up the commo van. Our team consisted of (b)(3)(c) and myself. Before we left Adana we were told that two communicators from (b)(1) (b)(3)(c) would be arriving in Adana to man that end of the circuit. The commo project chief, (b)(3)(c) who was on "permanent TDY" in Adana, said that in the event the operators were delayed, please keep the code speed down as he hadn't operated in a long while and he would be the only game in town.

We set up our van, one that had been put together by a previous team, which housed two HF receivers and an HT-4 HF transmitter (fondly called the "widow maker" because of the danger involved when making frequency changes). We then began a watch schedule of eight hours on, eight off, two men to a shift, with periodic checks with the base in Adana via CW (Morse code). When not on duty we hot-bunked it on two Army fold-up cots alongside the van a few hundred yards from the runway.

The remainder of the close support team, at (b)(3)(c) agency staffers of all kinds and some tech reps, were housed in the hangar area, but for us it was open air living, no shelter of any kind. Luckily it didn't rain. The exciting part of each day was when we opened up a box of IF-9's (in-flight rations) to see what culinary delight we had in store for us. The spaghetti, tuna, and marinated (pickled) beef were big hits. Low on the totem pole were five- to eight-year-old dinner rolls.

I decided to visit (b)(3)(c) one day and ended up in the "driver's" van. (The pilots of the U-2 were called drivers.) It was air-conditioned—what a luxury in the 90 degrees-plus heat of Peshawar. (b)(3)(c) showed me the space suit especially designed for our pilots and when I spotted a pistol I was told each driver carried a personal weapon. The driver selected for this mission was Francis Gary Powers and he carried a Colt Woodsman .22. I'm somewhat of a gun nut and ended up examining this particular pistol.

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"JGOHB" Puzzle

Indications were that D-Day was arriving. The "go" message would come from President Eisenhower, and he was playing this mission very close because of the upcoming summit with Khrushchev. A decision was not expected until the eleventh hour. The message was to be relayed from Headquarters to the Project Comcenter in Weisbaden, thence to Adana, which would pass it to us via CW. Sometime during the night before the mission was scheduled, the "bird" was pulled from the hangar and positioned at the end of the runway. As dawn broke I received my first glimpse of the U-2; long drooping wings, a bullet-like fuselage and all black with no markings—definitely meeting my expectations of what a spy plane should look like. The takeoff was scheduled for 6 a.m. Peshawar time. It was light long before then and we were in what is known in commo jargon as the transition period. The ionosphere would not support reliable communications between the two sites; the night frequencies were failing and the day frequencies were not yet stabilized. (b)(3)(c) and (b)(3)(c) were on duty but all four of us, plus (b)(3)(c) project chief, were in the van. It was crowded, hot, and tense. Outside, all the close support team members were standing around in anticipation of a takeoff, with all eyes focused on our little van. The U-2 sat on the runway midst the increasing heat waves. I am sure Gary Powers was tensing up as well. Somewhere around 6 a.m. we heard some CW on one of the guard frequencies we were frantically searching. While it sounded like Adana's signal and our operator's fist, the characters being sent made no sense and we continued our search and call procedure.

Like a magnet, that familiar signal sending repetitive characters kept drawing our attention. We passed the 6 a.m. takeoff time and by now (b)(3)(c) was in the first stages of a nervous breakdown with the rest of us not far behind. We were by now convinced that the signal was coming from our Adana base. We focused on the characters being sent, although they made no sense: "JGOHB." But wait—there was a slight discernible break after three and then two characters. It became "HBJ-GO-HBJ-GO," etc. The operator kept sending in the blind. We stared at these repeating five characters as if they comprised a puzzle. Someone started saying them—"HBJ-GO—HBJ-GO." I cannot recall which of us in the van finally broke the code but someone shouted: "HBJAYWALK GO!" That was it! (HBJAYWALK was the project cryptonym.) (b)(3)(c) almost broke a leg exiting the van and went racing across the field toward the bird. He waved for takeoff. By now it was about 6:15 a.m. Then, out of the eerie early morning stillness came the roar of the engine. Gary Powers was on his way.

As the U-2 contrail faded in the sky we felt drained but elated; commo had done its job one more time. The Adana operator had known that with the circuit out he could not send the formal enciphered mission approval message, so he sent all he dared to send in the clear and in the blind in the hope we would hear the signal and figure out what it meant. We had.

Feasting and Fingerprints

We were directed to stay in place until we were assured that the aircraft had passed the point of no return in the flight plan. But this time we were just

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about out of IF-9s and were rummaging around in the discarded cans of food that had not previously appealed to our palates. In true Agency fashion we were not forgotten. Another U-2 landed at Peshawar with cameras and recorders removed and their cavities filled with frozen T-bones and several bags of charcoal. We feasted, rested, packed up, and started back. Our C-130 landed at (b)(1) for a rest stop about 1 a.m. After a fine breakfast at (b)(1) and the passing around of some liquid fortification by the two standby drivers who had been pre-positioned there, it was off to a real bed in the BOQ. At around 5 a.m. we were rudely awakened by a loud knocking on our doors. "Get up, get dressed and be ready to move out." Something was wrong and the rumors began to fly—we had to go back, the bird was down, the bird was lost. . . . We sat around until mid-afternoon not knowing what was happening. (b)(3)(c) was closeted and all we could do was speculate. Everyone was grim faced and not enthused by the prospect of returning to Peshawar. There was universal concern for the driver and the success of the mission. Finally, in mid-afternoon, we boarded the C-130, took off, lost an engine, landed, reloaded the vans and equipment on a standby C-130, and headed back to Adana. Still no word on what had happened. The next morning we were debriefed and given the cover story on the loss of the plane; lost on a weather mission along the border and presumed to have inadvertently strayed over the border. Everyone was sworn to absolute secrecy. We received our per diem (about \$15 since quarters and rations were provided) and packed off back to (b)(1).

Several days after my return I was reading the *Stars and Stripes* at breakfast and there it was—Khrushchev had blown the lid off. To top it off, there was a picture of the "agent's weapon," a Colt Woodsman .22 with my fingerprints on it. My wife took one look at me and asked no questions—she knew where I had been for the last two weeks. The lid was also off back at work and our colleagues finally figured out where the "flying squad" had been flying to all along.

Did fate play one of its tricks on us this time? Who knows? Whatever the end result, commo did it's job. But maybe this would have been one time when we should have failed.

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